

## REVIEWS

### *Sister of the Solid Rock*

*Edna Mae Barnes Martin and the East Side Christian Center*

By Wilma Rugh Taylor

(Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2002. Pp. xxiv, 198.  
Illustrations, appendices, notes, index. \$24.95.)

The image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., linking arms with fellow marchers often dominates popular memory of the civil rights movement. It cannot, however, represent the rich variety of means African Americans pursued to achieve social justice during the mid-twentieth century. *Sister of the Solid Rock* reminds readers that the struggle for equity can start with one individual reaching out to nurture the promise of others.

Edna Mae Barnes was born into a southern migrant, poor, working-class family that settled in Indianapolis in the early 1900s. After high school, she met and married Earl Martin, and they enjoyed family life in the growing African-American middle class. Edna Mae was inspired by worsening conditions in her Martindale neighborhood to help the community's children. She started a Christian daycare program with two chil-

dren and an apartment rented with her household money. Throughout the 1940s the program struggled, unable to draw needed funding from the economically challenged community it served. Martin's independence had alienated many leaders in local African-American churches, and so when a few local white Baptist churches offered assistance, Martin joined with them and formed the East Side Christian Center (ESCC).

During the 1960s, the ESCC continued to grow and to gain more affluent white donors—in particular the Lilly Endowment. Martin, in her sixties, began to raise funds for a new facility and took on greater administrative responsibilities. By 1965, the facility, built in the heart of the Martindale community, catered to the needs of a broad variety of citizens, from parolees to teen mothers. Martin had neither the time nor, more

importantly, the inclination to march for civil rights. Wilma Rugh Taylor argues laboriously that Martin sympathized with many of Dr. King's goals but believed that serving and loving people would do more to eradicate the world's ills than civil disobedience and marching. The center's reliance on conservative white Baptists and businessmen for funding also meant that Martin could not have endorsed the civil rights movement, even had she wanted to, without considerable risk to the ESCC's finances. Illness finally forced Martin to leave her beloved center, and she died in 1974.

Unfortunately, the author never offers a deeper analysis of the complex racial, gender, and class issues that created tensions between Martin and the board of the ESCC. Taylor does recount some of the discrimination Martin faced when fundraising in small towns and rural areas across Indiana in the 1940s and

1950s, and she conveys a sense of the tightrope Martin walked trying to balance the needs of the center's clients, the demands of its white benefactors, and her own faith-based vision.

Overall, this biography succeeds in making Martin's achievements and actions as noteworthy as those of more familiar civil rights leaders. While the book lacks breadth in its choice of sources and would have benefited from an understanding of African-American women's grassroots activism, it shines a light on a life worth remembering and an institution still serving Indianians in need.

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*On the Banks of the Wabash*  
*The Life and Music of Paul Dresser*  
 By Clayton W. Henderson

(Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2003. Pp. xxix, 481.  
 Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

In this first biography of singer, songwriter, and comedic actor Paul Dresser, Clayton W. Henderson provides an engaging and enlightening account of his subject's life and times, with an emphasis on the culture of 1890s popular song. Dresser is a challenging subject for a biography because, unlike his more famous younger brother, the writer Theodore Dreiser, he left few personal records behind. There seem to be no diaries or autobiographical accounts, and only a

few letters. Any chronicle of his life depends upon contemporary sketches in newspapers and magazines and a few reminiscences of friends, most appearing long after Dresser's death. The most detailed accounts of Dresser's personality appear in his brother's works, chiefly the sketch "My Brother Paul" (*Twelve Men*, 1919) along with a few essays about the 1890s song business. All are refracted through the haze of the younger brother's hero-worship for Paul and his simulta-